

ECA Update: September 26, 2014



In this update:

Message from EM on Los Alamos Legacy Cleanup Work
Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management

Report: WIPP Leak Causes Shake Up at Los Alamos, Clean Up Work Taken Away From NNSA
Albuquerque Journal

Message from EM on Los Alamos Legacy Cleanup Work

DOE EM

September 26, 2014

EM Stakeholders,

Today Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz directed the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Environmental Management (EM) and DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) to develop a plan for the transition of legacy environmental cleanup work at the Department's Los Alamos site from NNSA to EM.

This change will align the focus and accountability of the cleanup with EM and enable the Los Alamos site prime contractor, Los Alamos National Security (LANS), to continue its focus on the core national security missions at the site. EM and NNSA will work together to evaluate all elements necessary for an effective transition, including federal oversight, acquisition strategies, and quality, safety and security.

DOE remains committed to the safe and efficient cleanup of the Los Alamos site and will continue to inform stakeholders about what steps will be taken as the details are developed.

Sincerely,
Mark Whitney
Acting EM Assistant Secretary Mark Whitney

Report: WIPP leak causes shake up at Los Alamos, clean up work taken away from NNSA

Albuquerque Journal
September 26, 2014

[LINK](#)

A respected publication that reports on the nation's nuclear labs says there's been a shake-up at Los Alamos National Laboratory in connection with the lab's role in a radioaction leak at the country's nuclear waste dump near Carlsbad.

More Information

[About ECA](#)

[Membership](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Helpful Links](#)

To help ensure that you receive all email with images correctly displayed, please add ecabulletin@aweber.com to your address book or contact list

[Subscribe](#)

to the ECA Email Server

[Online Version](#)

If you have trouble viewing this email, view the online version

[Upcoming Events](#)

[The Annual Decisionmakers' Forum](#)

Oct. 20-23, 2014
Amelia Island, Florida

[National Nuclear Science Week 2014](#)

Oct. 20-24, 2014

Weapons Complex Monitor is reporting that LANL Director Charlie McMillan on Thursday "relieved several managers of their duties in relation to the site's transuranic waste processing problems that have been linked to the radiological release at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant."

The Monitor's bulletin adds that the affected managers include Dan Cox, LANL deputy associate director of environmental programs; Jeff Mousseau, associate director of environmental programs; Kathy Johns-Hughes, Director of the LANL TRU (transuranic waste) Program; and Tori George, program director for regulatory management.

The four apparently have been reassigned.

The Monitor said the personnel moves come as the Department of Energy has decided to take cleanup work at Los Alamos National Laboratory away from the National Nuclear Security Administration and give that job to the Office of Environmental Management.

"DOE is expected to announce its plans for the cleanup work currently included in the Los Alamos National Security contract as soon as today, though the exact contract vehicle or vehicles to be used remains unclear," the Monitor reports. Los Alamos National Security is the private consortium that runs the lab under contract with the DOE.

DOE issued its own statement this morning. It says:

"As you may have heard, today Energy Secretary Moniz directed the Office of Environmental Management and the National Nuclear Security Administration to develop a plan for the transition of legacy environmental cleanup work at the Department's Los Alamos site from NNSA to EM (the Office of Environmental Management)."

A statement from a DOE spokesperson adds:

"The safe and efficient cleanup of the Los Alamos Site in New Mexico is a high priority for the Department of Energy. The Secretary of Energy has directed the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the Office of Environmental Management (EM) to develop a plan for the transition of the Los Alamos Site legacy environmental cleanup work from NNSA to EM.

" This will align the focus and accountability of cleanup work with the Department's environmental management program and enable the Los Alamos site prime contractor, Los Alamos National Security, to continue its focus on the core national security missions at the site. NNSA and EM will work together to evaluate all elements necessary for an effective transition including federal oversight, acquisition strategies, and quality, safety and security."

The Los Alamos lab has faced scrutiny after a barrel of transuranic waste from LANL that had been sent to WIPP popped open because of a chemical reaction in the drum in February, causing a radiation leak that has shut down the storage facility.

Some radioactivity also was released into the atmosphere but not at levels that can cause harm, officials have said.

The cause of chemical reaction still isn't known, but the lab has acknowledged that the mix of substances and materials in the barrel -- including a wheat-based kitty litter to absorb liquids that hadn't been used in the past -- and a lead-laden nuclear worker's glove are possible sources of the problem. Other barrels at WIPP are also considered at risk, including one with the same mix of materials, including the glove, as the one that breached.

Lab watchdog Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said in an email the changes wouldn't solve LANL's management problems.

"Since taking charge of the site LANS has wasted more than a half a billion dollars on failed construction projects, and at least three large projects are still in limbo today.

"The reason this is happening is because LANS's errors shut down WIPP, which has shed a glaring light on dangerous violations of hazardous waste law at LANL. LANS has been desperately trying to focus on 'uncertainty' and 'mystery,' when the acknowledged role of the LANL drum in shutting down WIPP has been clear for a long time.

"Dr. McMillan is right to take drastic action but the problems at LANL go deeper than a few individuals. Handing off cleanup to DOE is one way to get rid of a risky project, but that impulse -- splitting it off via subcontracting -- was a main source of the problem in the first place. It's an understandable corporate move, to get rid of risk and accountability by giving it to somebody else, but it remains to be seen if that's a good idea."